



Press release

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Chemical Materials Agency

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ABCDF RESTARTS NEUTRALIZATION OPERATIONS

ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND, Md. – Workers at the Aberdeen Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (ABCDF) restarted mustard agent neutralization operations Monday by resuming the draining of the thick, molasses-like liquid from its steel container. The facility suspended agent operations August 16, following the overheating of a carbon filter drum, and has been in a maintenance “stand-down” status since that time.

The resumption of agent draining marks the first use of a drain station modified during the maintenance stand-down by the systems contractor, Bechtel Aberdeen, to include a specially designed “monitoring annex.” Since the initiation of agent operations in April, the destruction of Edgewood’s bulk mustard stockpile has progressed more slowly than estimated because of difficulties encountered in decontaminating the steel containers once they were drained of agent inside the drain station glove box.

With community and worker safety as the overriding consideration, plant officials, aided by Army and civilian technical experts, reviewed all aspects of container decontamination and monitoring procedures. “Even though a container may be empty of agent,” said Army ABCDF Site Project Manager Joseph Lovrich, “we must ensure that it is safe to remove from the facility and place into temporary storage before final processing. We’ve had difficulty confirming the cleanliness of the containers in the past because of challenges with background contamination from within the glove box itself.”

The monitoring annexes, constructed for each of the three drain stations, were designed to solve the difficulties in clearing the containers from the glove boxes. “They are essentially 9-foot extensions to the drain station rooms,” continued Lovrich, “but separate from them so that the

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extensions can be sealed off. This means we can isolate and monitor the cleanliness of the entire container, separate from the glove boxes.”

In a methodical ramp-up, similar to procedures followed when the plant first opened in April, agent draining will be done in a single drain station initially, with the remaining two stations brought on line over the next month.

In addition to the work on the drain stations, ABCDF engineers and technicians have made a number of modifications to the neutralization processing equipment itself to improve its overall efficiency and prevent a recurrence of the carbon filter drum incident where caustic used to flush processing lines reacted chemically with the carbon filter material.

Mustard agent disposal operations at the ABCDF, located in the Edgewood Area of Aberdeen Proving Ground, have successfully neutralized and destroyed more than 55 tons of agent since April. Ninety-four truckloads of the neutralization byproduct, called hydrolysate, have been safely shipped to DuPont Secure Environmental Treatment in Deepwater, NJ for biotreatment.